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THE METCO STUDENT HANDBOOK:

WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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PREFACE

The purpose of the METCO STUDENT HANDBOOK is to provide information to Metco students, resident students, parents and school personnel regarding the Metco program, what is expected of the Metco student and what the Metco student should expect from the program. It is designed to be a supplement to the student handbooks published by the various participating school districts.

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INTRODUCTION

Questions and Answers About The Metco Program

1. What is the Metco Program?

   "Metco Program" is the commonly used name for the state-funded, voluntary desegregation program, officially known as the program to eliminate racial imbalance.

2. What is the purpose of the Metco Program?

   The purpose of the Metco Program is to provide:
   (a) an opportunity for an integrated public school education for urban Black and Other Minority children from racially imbalanced schools in Boston and Springfield by placing them in suburban schools;

   (b) a new integrated learning experience for suburban children;

   (c) and a better understanding and closer cooperation between urban and suburban parents and other citizens in the Metropolitan Boston and Springfield areas.

3. Why is the Metco Program possible?

   Section 7 of Chapter 636 of the Acts of 1974 makes the Metco Program possible. Accordingly, local school committees may adopt a plan for attendance at its schools by any child who resides in another city in which racial imbalance exists in public schools. The plan must tend to eliminate racial imbalance, must be consistent with the purpose of the law, and must include an estimate of the expenses necessary to implement such a plan.

   The local school committee then files the plan with the State Board of Education for approval. If the Board of Education approves the plan, it enters into an agreement with the local school committee under which the non-resident students are accepted for attendance, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides funds for the implementation of the plan.

4. Who is responsible for the successful implementation of the Metco Program?

   The responsibility for the successful implementation of the Metco Program is shared by the Massachusetts Department of

Education which administers the program, the central service providers (currently METCO, Inc. and the Springfield School Department) which coordinate certain activities, and the participating school districts which provide direct educational and counseling services.

5. Who are the Metco students?

Approximately 3400 students from Boston and Springfield attend schools in 37 suburban school districts as participants in the program to eliminate racial imbalance. They are either Black or from some other racial/ethnic minority group in all grade levels, K-12.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Metco students are subject to the same rights and responsibilities as the resident students in the schools they attend. Participating school districts are expected to provide all of the ordinary services and benefits to Metco students that are provided to resident students, as well as any additional support which is necessary to assure that the non-resident students have a successful educational experience.

Metco students are expected to fullfill the academic requirements and to adhere to the rules and regulations of their schools, and they are subject to the disciplinary actions and procedures established for students who break school rules.

However, given the unique situation of the Metco students, the following is a supplement to the school-based rules and regulations:

1. Academic Performance

   It is strongly recommended that Metco students maintain at least a C average. If a Metco student does not maintain at least a C- average, he or she should attend tutoring sessions provided by the school district, the central service provider or other appropriate sources.

2. Attendance

   Metco students are expected to attend school every day. When students are absent from school, they must adhere to the school-based rules regarding absenteeism.

3. Automobiles

   Metco students are discouraged from driving cars to school. If they do drive to school, they must adhere to the school-based rules regarding the use of automobiles.

4. Behavior On The Bus

   Metco students must adhere to the following rules and regulations regarding behavior on the bus to/from school. Failure to do so may lead to the loss of bus privileges.

   -Playing radios or tape recorders without earphones is not allowed;

-Movement from seat to seat is not allowed;

-Fighting is not allowed;

-Weapons of any kind are not allowed;

-Loud talking, swearing, rudeness or rowdiness is not allowed;

-Smoking, using drugs or consuming alcoholic beverages is not allowed;

-Extending the head or other parts of the body outside of the window, holding objects outside of the window or throwing objects from the window are not allowed;

-Interfering with the bus driver, monitor and/or bus contractor during the performance of their duties is not allowed; and

-Any action which demonstrates a lack of self-respect or respect for others and their property is not allowed.

Any violation of behavior standards on the bus is expected to be resolved the day of the occurrence. In school districts where METCO, Inc. manages transportation, bus drivers or monitors must report any serious infraction to the METCO, Inc. office the day it happens. Depending on the severity of the infraction, the student may receive a warning. A student may receive as many as three warnings. After the third warning, the parent is required to ride the bus with the child. There may be instances which result in suspension from the bus without warning, if the seriousness of the infraction warrants such action. (If a student is suspended from the bus, he or she is not necessarily suspended from school; the parent may arrange for private transportation.)

In school districts which manage their own transportation, bus drivers or monitors must report any serious infraction to the Metco coordinator. The Metco coordinator will apply school-based disciplinary procedures regarding conduct on school busses.

5. Contractual Agreements

Sometimes Metco coordinators use contractual agreements with students as counseling tools for students who are having behavioral, academic and/or attendance problems. In some instances students agree to make specific improvement in their behavior, academic performance and/or attendance during a specific period of time or

else they will withdraw from the program. Such contractual agreements are binding only if they are signed by the superintendent, the coordinator, the student, and the parent.

Upon entering into such an agreement, students and parents should be aware that their future in the program is in jeopardy, and they should be informed by the superintendent or the coordinator that signing the contractual agreement is not a requirement.

6. Parental Responsibility

The responsibility of Metco parents for participation in the program is described in the Metco Parent Handbook. However, students are not responsible for their parents' actions or inactions, and they should not be penalized for their parents' lack of responsibility.

AVAILABLE SUPPORT SERVICES

1. The Metco Coordinator

The coordinator is responsible for the overall planning and implementation of the Metco program in his/her school district and is accountable to the superintendent. Although the coordinator may serve as the liaison or link between the Metco students and the local school personnel by interpreting their needs and problems and by being the chief advocate for Metco students, the role of the Metco coordinator should not be confused with that of the principal, teacher, parent or counselor. Students should not expect the coordinator to address all of their needs; they should seek support from the appropriate school-based personnel. The coordinator and/or his/her staff are available to help Metco students on issues or problems which are directly related to the Metco program.

2. School-based Personnel

Administrators, teachers and counselors in participating schools are responsible for the educational and social support services all students (including Metco students) may need for a successful educational experience. Metco students should utilize all available services provided by their schools.

3. Central Service Providers

As of school year 1987-88 METCO, Inc. provides supplemental academic and counseling support, including tutorials for Boston-area students.

4. Extracurricular Activities

Participating school districts and schools are required to observe all relevant provisions of Section 6.00 of the Chapter 622 Regulation which pertains to extracurricular activities and stipulates that "No student shall be denied the opportunity in any implied or explicit manner to participate in an extracurricular activity because of race, color, sex, religion or national origin of the student..."

Late transportation will be provided for students participating in after-school activities.

5. Host Families

Most participating school districts have a "host family" program, which pairs Metco students with local families who support the students by providing a "home away from home".

6. Chapter 766

Chapter 766 services are available to Metco students who have special needs.

CONTINUED ELIGIBILITY

The central service providers (currently METCO, Inc. and the Springfield School Department) as well as participating school districts and the Department of Education are committed to the successful completion of each Metco student's education in the school district in which he/she has been placed. However, participation in the Metco program is not a guaranteed right and many students are currently waiting to enter the program. Therefore, Metco students are expected to make continuous progress at a rate commensurate with their academic ability as well as to adhere to the rules and regulations of their schools. When a Metco student does not take full advantage of the opportunity or abuses the privilege of participating in the program, it may become necessary for the student to be withdrawn from the program according the following procedure:

Termination Procedure for Metco Students

Students may be dropped from the Metco program only by the superintendent of the school district they attend. No student should be dropped unless a case conference is conducted and after all available options of the students have been exhausted. The case conference shall include the superintendent and other school district staff, the coordinator and representatives from METCO, Inc. (or the Springfield School Department).

Documentation of steps taken by the school district to retain the student in the school system should be presented at the conference. The case conference should take place as soon as possible after termination is contemplated by the school district. The conference should result in a written statement of either further steps to retain the student in the school system or to drop the student from the program. If no agreement is reached, there should be a written statement that the parties could not agree and why, including the action which the superintendent intends to take.

Such statements should be filed immediately with the Bureau of School Programs of the Department of Education. In cases of termination, the report should also indicate whether the school district intends to fill the place and if and when the service provider will make a new placement.

In every case student rights must be respected.

Complaint Process

Any Metco student or parent who feels he/she has been treated unfairly by any component of the Metco program may file a complaint with the Bureau of School Programs of the Department of Education.